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Languages in the News

Endangered Languages?

Yes, they do in fact exist! National Geographic's Enduring Voices project draws our attention to this phenomenon. We frequently overlook the fact that 80 percent of the world's population speaks less than one percent of the human languages in existence. This means that as smaller and more remote cultures dwindle in number, so do their representative speakers and as a result the survivability of their language. For a more in depth look at this problem and an attempt to preserve a record of these endangered languages, see National Geographic's Endangered Languages Project or the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages.

Are the Scots ahead?

Speaking two languages rather than just one has obvious practical benefits in an increasingly globalized world. Recognizing this, Scottish Government has taken a serious step forward. It has begun funding second language learning acquisition in primary school at a cost of 600,000 pounds. For more information, see the BBC article "Call to teach second language in Scots schools from P1"

Can computers translate?

It seems this is becoming a reoccurring 80 million dollar question, as the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Agency has renewed its investment in computerized translation. Despite the fact that the TransTac computer program failed to translate "Can you introduce me to the village elder?" in Pashto, DARPA continues to invest in successor translation program known as BOLT. For more information, see the New America article, "Why Computers Still Can't Translate".

Contributions:

On Crashing My Bike.....2
Horizon Events in Language Learning.....1
Q & A with Christina Stopka Rinnert.....2
Mu Xi Members Take Center Stage 4

News:

Faculty News.....3
Students Headed to Susquehanna.....2
Mansfield's Poetry Society Aids Poe House.....3
Languages in the News.....1

Horizon Events in Language Learning

—William Keeth

Most would agree that standardized levels of learning and budget trimming are two important but sometimes competing ideas in Education. As both PASSHE and PDE push for standardization and inter-institutional transferability, they equally push for budget reductions. And, as their educational policy shifts towards these educational problems, both groups of administrators begin to look more often at technology for the efficient cross-pollinated "save".

At present, technology does not seem to adequately translate the administrative agenda into workable results, at least not in terms of foreign language learning. As the recent PADFL report ("*Rosetta Stone* and Language Teaching in the 21st century: A collective statement from PASSHE Language Departments") demonstrates, technological delivery of language instruction frequently fails to: (1) accommodate for different learning styles, (2) provide dynamic delivery of L2, (3) ensure meaningful enough application of language and sociolinguistic skills, (4) provide as effective hours of language contact/study, or (5) ensure student internalization of grammatical structures. Nonetheless, the case of technological solutions will remain debatable as newer solutions arise on the horizon.

Some think that *Duolingo* represents such a horizon event. In March 2011, the National Science Foundation gave Professor Luis von Ahn and his research group a $480,000 grant to build the first free language-learning website--one which is based on a crowdsourced model of translation. Currently *Duolingo* is in its beta phase of testing and I have, fortunately, been chosen as a *Duolingo* participant.

As of today, I have spent a few hours using the program, have translated a number of simple sentences, and have advanced to Level 7. If I weren't already teaching Spanish, this would mean that I have learned to recognize basic words and concepts (food, animals, clothing, colors, and time) and have gained enough experience experimenting with either Spanish learning modules or Spanish-to-English translation exercises that I can recognize the rules of plurality, possession, and present tense verb conjugation. According to *Duolingo*, my peers at Level 7 include a London resident who is a fan of Pippi Longstocking, "Vestpocketvenus", an engineering student called "Yetidan", two fans of TED like myself, the German "Bretti" and the Bulgarian "Chocohohoholic", a Canadian

(Continued on page 3)

Please, send news, announcements, and contributions to: ksanner@mansfield.edu

On Crashing My Bike

—Jimmy Guignard

On the Monday before Thanksgiving back in aught 11, I crashed my bike on my commute home. One minute I was thinking about picking up my son. The next thing I remember was sitting in the backseat of a pick-up truck talking with a woman who, with her husband, found me unconscious in Ore Bed Rd. The ambulance soon arrived, Lilace and Gloria showed up, and I went to the hospital. (I made sure Lilace had my bike, though I didn't check it for damage for three days. I must've been hurtin'.) Three milligrams of Dilaudid, a cat scan, some x-rays, and a sling later, I was on my way home. The diagnosis: a concussion, fractured clavicle, possible broken ribs, severely contused elbow, and road rash. (Turned out to be three broken ribs.)

I haven't been to the hospital for a bike crash since

(Continued on page 5)

Students Headed to Susquehanna

Emily R. Cole and Ashley Bedford (Ensminger), have research papers accepted at the 2012 Susquehanna University Undergraduate Conference in Selinsgrove, PA. Emily will present "Of the Folks, by the Folks, for the Folks: Dave Carter and the Rhetoric of Folk Music," and Ashley will present "A Beautiful World: The Rhetorical Effect of *Women's Health* Magazine on Female Readers." Dr. Ulrich and Dr. Guignard will accompany the students.

Q & A with Christina Stopka Rinnert

Q: Would you briefly describe the papers you presented and the awards you received at the conference?

A: I presented a compilation of four of my poems entitled, "Life, Love, and Grief." I was also fortunate to be asked to present my paper on Jane Austen entitled, "Teachers and Students in Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Persuasion*." I participated in open mic night (on the first night of our arrival) where I read my poem "I am Waiting" which was enthusiastically received by the audience and I met a few terrific people after we closed. During the conference I was one of ten people awarded an honorable mention for my conference submission essay which was written on the theme, "Reawaken" and was called "Live for the Words" and discussed my journey back to my love of writing.

Q: Tell us about the conference and the city. What were some of the highlights of the trip?

A: One of the highlights of the trip for me was the food in New Orleans. The conference was uplifting and educational, but the food in New Orleans: it was amazing! We tried gumbo with crusty French bread, crawfish étouffée, shrimp po boys, fried green tomatoes, red beans and rice, and one of my favorites: fried cheesecake. We met so many fascinating and intelligent people who shared meals with us and shared their stories with us. The Bad Poetry competition was so funny. I had no idea that listening to epic poetry, bad epic poetry, could be such a joy! I toured around the city on Saturday, taking a carriage ride tour of the French Quarter, watching street performers, listening to jazz music being played in a book store by the Navy Jazz Band of New Orleans. We walked over to the Cafe Du Monde and ate beignets - a fried dough covered with powdered sugar and a New Orleans tradition. Emily [Cole] and I also took the "History, Ghosts, and Voodoo Tour" which was a walking tour around the city. Our guide was a history teacher at a local school and he told us some terrific stories about the area and different houses and local ghost stories. We didn't see any ghosts but the tour was definitely educational.

Q: The prospect of applying to a conference is intimidating to a lot of students. Would you describe the process to us and give students some advice for applying?

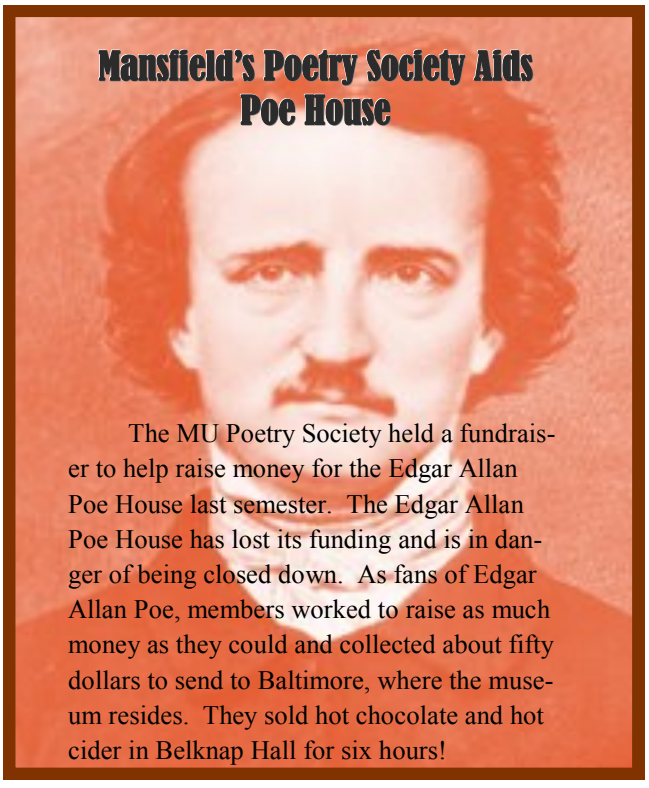
A: The process for the Sigma Tau Delta conference is very easy. It's done online and you submit work you have already

completed so basically it's just a matter of filling out the form and attaching the documents to it. Be sure that you proofread and edit the work before you send it. Send your very best work. Don't be nervous about being accepted or not; submit for the experience of submitting to a major conference, and worry about the rest later.

Q: What was the best thing you brought home from the conference (tangible, or intangible)? Did you learn something new, make a great connection, etc?

A: I think the best thing I brought back from this conference was probably the contacts I made with like-minded individuals. I have spent the majority of my life believing that I am somehow so different from others that I would never really fit in, and then to have an experience like this one, where I was surrounded by people who love literature, poetry, exposition, conversation, and critique as much as I do. Well, that was eye opening. It was an amazing feeling. And the people I met there, other poets, other feminists, other Jane Austen critics, are now friends with me on FaceBook and we are often emailing things back and forth. The conversation will continue long after the conference. I am already anticipating seeing these people next year.

The experience of the conference is not one that can be obtained anywhere else. It is a unique and encouraging event that everyone in Sigma Tau Delta should attend, even if they are not presenting papers. It truly has helped to confirm my life choice of teaching English.



The MU Poetry Society held a fundraiser to help raise money for the Edgar Allan Poe House last semester. The Edgar Allan Poe House has lost its funding and is in danger of being closed down. As fans of Edgar Allan Poe, members worked to raise as much money as they could and collected about fifty dollars to send to Baltimore, where the museum resides. They sold hot chocolate and hot cider in Belknap Hall for six hours!

Faculty News

Dr. Andrea Harris presented her paper "Famers, Gardeners, and Consumers: Teaching About Food in Rural Pennsylvania" at the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in Rochester, New York in March. She also chaired a panel on "Translating the Holocaust."

Dr. Jimmy Guignard's essay, "A Certain Uncertainty: Drilling into the Rhetoric of Marcellus Shale Development," has been accepted into *Environmental Rhetoric: Ecologies of Place*, a collection of essays edited by Peter Goggin. This summer in Philadelphia, he will present "Been Here's vs. Drill Here's: The Rhetorics Framing Natural Gas Development of the Marcellus Shale" at the annual conference of the Rhetoric Society of America.

In November, **Dr. John Ulrich** presented his paper, "'Carlyle too was at the Opera God help us!': Audience, Performance, and Spectacle at Her Majesty's Theatre," at the North American Victorian Studies Association conference hosted by Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. In January, he presented his paper, "The Portfolio Writes Back: Theory and Practice in English Program Assessment," as part of the roundtable on "Assessing Assessment" at the Modern Language Association Convention in Seattle, Washington. This paper has been accepted for publication in the journal *Pedagogy*. In March he gave a presentation entitled "Beowulf as Superhero" at the Comic Arts Conference held in conjunction with WonderCon in Anaheim, California.

Horizon Events in Language Learning

(Continued from page 1)

trilingual "Zajac89", an Indian nomad "kyubkyub", the procrastinating Australian law student "Smoja", and the Australian chemist "Orion". Indeed, I am among quite a varied group of international learners.

As a programed data server, *Duolingo* gives each participant a leveled translating exercise. And, in return for being able to learn the second language through a tiered translation exercise, we provide multiple solutions to the translation problem in our native language. *Duolingo* cross-examines our answers, produces relational scores of accuracy, and feeds this information back into the translational loop for users translating in the other direction. This concept is very similar to von Ahn's crowdsource project, *reCAPTCHA*, where users visually confirm bits of information over-looked by OCR reading software in the guise of internet security protocols. In *reCAPTCHA* word recognition serves both as security device that verifies that a user is indeed human and at the same time outsources human OCR processing. *Duolingo*, of course, is a bit more sophisticated, as it portends to hone mass

(Continued on page 4)

Horizon Events in Language Learning

(Continued from page 3)

amateur translations with out-sourced native language feedback.

In order to break away from the reading/writing paradigm, the program also utilizes ATT speech synthesizers to produce short spoken passages in the second language. This is all mixed with visuals and thematic graphics. As a user, I have passed through developmental exercises that essentially revolve around a grammatical and vocabulary proficiency-based decision tree. Like any user, I may follow a preformatted instructional unit or advance strictly through thematically related translation exercises that are gauged to be at the same grammatical level of difficulty. I can rate other user translations, record and play back my voice, and participate in a Q&A blog. The program even encourages a routine of daily practice by allowing me to opt-in to an email reminder system.

As I see it, *Duolingo* has gained some ground on *Rosetta Stone*. The decision tree and gauged translation exercises allow for more self-paced independent learning, something that helps accommodate, to a certain degree, different learning styles. And, if computer language programs like *Rosetta Stone* fail to provide any means of analyzing written compositions, *Duolingo* has, to a degree, broken down this obstacle through piecemeal translation. Nonetheless, its written evaluation is strictly based on imitation and whatever hidden text-selection criteria there may be in the software. Like *Wikipedia*, there is no guarantee of the written text's quality nor grammatical accuracy let alone its originality. The only stipulation seems to be that the text be produced by a native language writer. As far as spoken evaluation, both *Duolingo* and *Rosetta Stone* are not capable of comparing my voice to native voice patterns. In the case of the former, even at its best the non-existent assessment would only represent a comparison of my voice with a synthesized voice--nothing near the sophisticated level of speech pattern comparison that goes on in classroom one-on-one interaction. So, in a sense, through crowdsourcing *Duolingo* has opened the door to more effective computer driven compositional analysis and potentially reduced the cost of written content production.

Nevertheless, the promise of the horizon events in computational instruction like *Duolingo* is minimal in terms of effective foreign language teaching. Both *Duolingo* and *Rosetta Stone* fail to compete with one-on-one instruction. They both need to more closely bridge the

(Continued on page 5)

Sigma Tau Delta members

Mu Xi Members Take Center Stage at International Convention

Emily R. Cole and Christina Stopka Rinnert, two members of Mu Xi, the Mansfield University chapter of the international English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, enjoyed much success and attention at the organization's international convention in New Orleans this month. Both students submitted entries and, of the 1200 submissions, were chosen to present their work at the conference. Emily presented her critical essay titled "Nothin' but Trash: Dorothy Allison's Retelling of the White Trash Experience," and Christina presented both a collection of her poetry and her essay, "Teachers and Students in Jane Austen's *Emma* and *Persuasion*." Best of all, both students also received special recognition at the conference. Emily won the $2000 "runner-up" Senior Scholarship and Christina received an honorable mention for her essay on the conference theme, "reawaken."

Meanwhile, the chapter has been busy planning events for this semester and welcoming six new members. Amanda Cino, Olivia Mishler, Cameron Murphy, Rachel Sterling, Emily Wolfel, and Stephanie Williams joined the organization this semester and will be inducted, along with the fall new members, in a special ceremony on April 18th at 4pm. In April members plan to take a trip to Ithaca to see a stage production of *Measure for Measure* along with members of the MU Poetry Society. Ongoing efforts to raise funds and to support the Better World Book Drive are also in the works.

Sigma Tau Delta members

Last semester the chapter held a book drive and collected six boxes of books which were sent to Better World Book Drive. Marta Knapp, STD fall semester president, also created a Facebook page for better group communication and connection. In conjunction with the MU Poetry Club, Sigma Tau Delta also held a small bake sale during and following Dr. Judith Sornberger's reading of her poetry. The proceeds from this bake sale will go toward department t-shirts.

Emmm...dessert in New Orleans.

(Continued from page 2)

On Crashing My Bike

I was six or seven. My Mom took me then. We lived in Mississippi, and I was riding my neighbor Malone's ragged bike down the hill beside our house popping wheelies, imagining I was Evel Knievel, my hero at the time. (I still have my Evel doll. It's in my office at school.) Malone rode my sweet yellow Schwinn with ape-hangers, banana seat, and rear slick. Mom sunbathed in the front yard. One trip down the hill, I pulled back on the bars, only to watch Malone's front wheel exit the front fork and bounce down the road. Since I'm (still) not Evel, I couldn't hold that wheelie forever. Fork, meet pavement. I launched over the bars, landing on my face and chest. My cut-off jeans didn't protect me like Evel's leathers protected him as I slid to a stop on my bare chest. I must have screamed, because Mom appeared instantly beside me. My chest was solid road rash, prompting my younger brother to exclaim later "Jimmy scraped his titty off!" and my left arm dangled uselessly. Hence the visit to the ER. X-rays (no broken bones!) and tetanus shot later, and I was on the way home. (My Dad learned of my crash while putting for money on the 18th hole at the local golf course. He sank the putt and came to the ER.) I was back on *my* bike later that day.

In the intervening years, I've ridden thousands of miles of roads and trails in several states. I've raced all kinds of races on all kinds of bikes. I've witnessed all kinds of crashes, and crashed a few times myself. Given all that, I find it amusing that my worst crash to date occurred due to a rookie mistake on the commute home on a road I'd ridden many times—not paying attention. Not paying attention cost me six weeks off the bike and around ten weeks of not riding outside, the longest break I've had from riding in nine years. Adding insult to injury, it was a mild winter, too. (Last winter, I rode regularly, including possibly my sweetest moment—meeting my cyclist buddy Jared, I on my bike, he in his car, in the dark, his car's thermometer reading seven. Because of those rides, I didn't thaw out until June.)

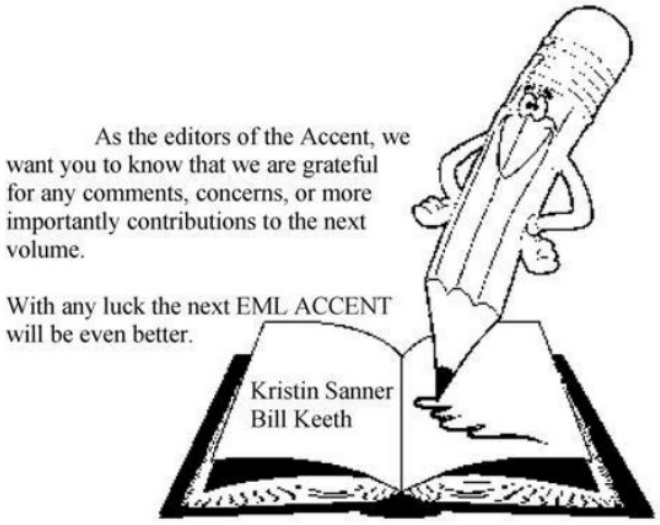
Since my crash, I've gone back and forth about what it means. On one level, it means nothing. I wasn't paying attention, smacked the ground, end of story. On another level, it reminded me that I'm a part of a special community here. The outpouring of support boosted me through the worst physical pain I've ever experienced. As some of you (unfortunately) know, breaking ribs is not good. Clearing my throat hurt. I worked actively to avoid sneezing or coughing for weeks. I forbid my kids to say anything funny. But your support helped dull the pain as much as Vicodin and Percocet. (The gifts of beer helped, too.) I also have a renewed appreciation for modern medicine and donors, an appreciation I'd have preferred remained theoretical. My clavicle required a steel plate, ten screws, and cadaver bone to piece back together. I am now part cyborg, part zombie, though my taste in flesh still runs to the porcine. I do find myself wondering from time to time about the identity of the dead guy in my shoulder, but I figure if he was willing to undertake the ultimate in recycling, he's all right.

Mostly, I missed riding. Now that I have a few miles back in the saddle, I realize how much riding connects me to the world outside. I can keep track of the red-winged blackbirds, the red-tailed hawks, the red efts, and the spotted salamanders, the water level in the creeks, the cycle of growth and decay that occurs each year. I keep track of which houses are for sale, where the gas wells are being built, and where barking dogs run after me. I connect with friends I don't see much otherwise, and I connect with the little boy trapped in a 45-year-old body pretending he's Evel Knievel. I am reminded that the world is bigger than me, which gives me hope.

Horizon Events in Language Learning

(Continued from page 4)

meaningful application of language and sociolinguistic skills and they both need to ensure a creative internalization of both oral and written communication skills, grammar accuracy included. Although *Rosetta Stone* has begun to recognize its shortsightedness and compensate for the missing teacher by offering scheduled one-on-one virtual chat sessions at additional charge and although *Duolingo* could eventually outsource chat interaction in a similar crowd-based manner, neither system has demonstrated more effective time-on-task activities nor any measure of quality enhancement in terms of one-on-one language interaction. In fact, the trend may be in the opposite direction, as neither outsourcing nor privatization guarantee any measure of scrutiny when it comes to the quality of the native-language speaker/chatter. The danger for language learners and education itself, then, lies in a failure to adequately recognize the level of technological and pedagogical advancement inherent in software development. What is worse, this failure may mistakenly lead to organizational reorganization instead of classroom enhancement. Even in the future when technology may more closely bridge these oral and written communication competencies, the value of quality one-on-one interaction will prevail. The question is how to reorganize the classroom structure so that these technologies enhance the power of this educational player and this very important educational task.


As the editors of the Accent, we want you to know that we are grateful for any comments, concerns, or more importantly contributions to the next volume.
With any luck the next EML ACCENT will be even better.
Kristin Sanner
Bill Keeth